

SHIPBUILDING

(From an 1895 newspaper)

Some reminiscences of shipbuilding in Duxbury, half a century ago.

Of the value of the work done in the Duxbury shipyards, the late Hon. E. S. Tobey once said: "To speak of the character of the numerous first-class ships which have been built here, would be to recall the names of the best mechanics and skilled artisans of the whole country. To speak of the men who commanded those ships, would be to make honorable mention of intelligent and eminent navigators, who with the flag of the republic at the mast head, guided their ships into nearly every commercial port of the habitable globe."

Duxbury as a settlement is almost as old as its neighbor, Plymouth, for we learn that some of the earliest settlers of Plymouth, soon after the "distribution of cattle" in 1627, found it necessary to extend their pastures far beyond the original limits, and in 1628 had already sought room on the north side of the harbor, within the borders of what is now Duxbury. For convenience in caring for the pastured animals, the owners formed the habit of remaining here through the summer, returning for the winter to their Plymouth homes, that their connection with the church might not be broken.

It inevitably followed, however, that more substantial dwellings were built upon the northern shore, and in 1637 the little hamlet had so far grown, with such proprietors as Standish, Brewster, Winslow, Alden, Howland, Soule and Sampson, as to petition the General Court of the Plymouth Colony for incorporation as a new township, to be named by Myles Standish, Duxbury. Reluctantly, no doubt, the conservatives, who dreaded this breaking asunder of church ties, granted the petition, and so the separate existence of the town began. Its boundaries were not fixed until later; at that time it included much that is now a part of neighboring towns. We learn that Duxbury from the first attracted a fine class of residents through the superior fertility of its soil to that of Plymouth. This applied especially to the part first settled, known as "the Nook."

First Yard

There is no record of the only real industry the town ever enjoyed, shipbuilding, prior to

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1720, about which time Thomas Prince is said to have established the first yard within its limits for the building of vessels, on the westerly shore of the Nook, at the foot of Captain's Hill. The first vessel built there was a sloop, constructed mostly of wild cherry. The second yard was owned by Israel Sylvester, on Bluefish River; the third by Benjamin Freeman at Harden Hill, a short distance north from the Nook, and near the extreme southeastern part of the town.

Perez Drew owned the fourth yard, location not known. Samuel Winsor, the first of the name in Duxbury, and Samuel Drew together carried on the fifth yard, on the shore of the nook westward of Captain's Hill. Samuel Winsor had previously, about 1745-50, built several vessels on Clark's Island. The sixth yard was established by Isaac Drew at the west side of the Nook.

Duck Hill Yard

John Oldham had a yard at Duck Hill, in the northern part of the town, not far from the Marshfield line, where now it is mostly salt meadow, and the

creeks are nearly filled with coarse sedge.

There was till another ship yard carried on by Capt. Samuel Detano below the mouth of Bluefish river, on the west side.

These yards had nearly all been abandoned before 1830, and were succeeded by James Soule's yard at the extreme southwest part of the town between Captain's Hill and the mouth of the Jones river in Kingston. He built what were then considered good-sized vessels. The yard of Benjamin Prior, on the southeast part of the town shore, near the Nook, was occupied by Ezra Weston, and there Samuel Hall built for him several ships.

The ship Mattakeesett, built about 1833, of 480 tons, whose first commander was Capt. Briggs Thomas, was the largest merchant vessel that had then been built in New England.